



Dunn, L., and Andrew, M. (2013) Powerful partnerships: enhancing the student experience through career long professional learning [Poster]. In: HEA Annual Conference, 3-4 July 2013, Warwick, UK.

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Introduction

The School of Education (SofE) recognises the importance of promoting opportunities for students and staff to engage with each other. Higher Education (HE) has been transformed over the last twenty years and the change from teacher-centred pedagogy to a more student-centred approach has been widely adopted (O'Neill and McMahon, 2005). The SofE provides a rich and diverse curriculum of study across a range of degree programmes. We have established a staff and student partnership which has seen a refreshed focus on the student, where their voice is influential in what they learn. This has been the emphasis of many researchers in the past. Both Rogers (1983) and Burnard (1999) illustrate that this is essential in establishing and maintaining student-centred learning.

In September 2012, a group of students led by Marc Andrew (BEd Year 2), sought an increased sense of autonomy in their studies by establishing an independent student network which would promote career long professional learning beyond the traditional curriculum. The partnership evolved after Marc sought support from staff, to take his ideas forward. Working with Lee Dunn, a University Teacher, the *Glasgow University Student Teacher Network* (GUSTN³) was officially launched in April 2013 (Fig 1).



Fig.1 Student Marc Andrew (Left), University Teacher Lee Dunn (Centre) and Deputy Head of School Dr Beth Dickson (Right) at the launch event.

GUSTN and the partnership upon which it is built are innovative. We have been recognised nationally by individuals from Education Scotland⁴ and The Scottish Government⁵ and we have also seen early collaboration with students from other HE institutions, across degree programmes and between year groups. A seminar, for example, may be delivered by a student who knows sign language or perhaps has returned from an international exchange in Spain.

Background

Dunn (2013) had previously carried out a study within The University and he illustrated the desire of students to engage in their learning via social interaction on *Facebook*⁶ and *Twitter*⁷. There was an opportunity to combine the work of GUSTN with networking tools which were fit for purpose. There is evidence that undergraduate, postgraduate students and staff are sharing resources and exchanging theory; this continues to grow externally (Fig 2). GUSTN is also followed by qualified and practicing teachers who contribute on a regular basis, both nationally and internationally, through established communities of practice such as *Pedagoo*⁸.



Fig.2 Marc Andrew delivers a seminar which focusses on the power of the partnership, the role of staff in a support capacity and the leadership of the network: by students for students.

The Student Perspective

Marc Andrew shares his thoughts on the staff and student partnership:

“Being a young student, at the beginning of my career, it is at times difficult to be taken seriously. This is why it is important to have Lee [staff] on board as he gave some academic weight and backing to what we wanted to do, and allowed us to get the ball rolling much faster. Without the support of our staff, the society and all its current and future success would still be aspirational.”

Our partnership allows us [students] to scope our ideas and utilise the vast experience of our tutors in learning, teaching and research. The nature of the [GUSTN] network requires us to connect with education professionals from around the world. Our tutors have helped us with this, providing advice and guidance along the way.

I had no idea how to make my ideas reality and without Lee's help we wouldn't be here today. A tweet from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, recognising our activity and wishing us luck was the icing on the cake.”

The long term outcomes are yet to be realised, but the immediate impact on ethos and study has already seen a return; students are able to access broader, richer and deeper learning, building a culture of lifelong learning and scholarship.

The Staff Perspective

The partnership has been beneficial to staff. It has contributed to the ethos of The SofE and has been conducive towards building a culture of learning, where the sharing of effective practice and experiences between partners has broken down the remaining barriers between staff and student. In many cases, the divide is relative. For example, members of academic staff are also students of The University and so interaction has simply gained momentum.

The Next Steps

Dunn (2013) describes the benefits of such interaction between students and staff (and peer-to-peer) as:

- Increased student motivation and engagement with course material;
- Increased student-to-student collaboration;
- Enhanced interaction between the student and the lecturer / teacher;
- Accelerated data and information sharing for the purposes of study and research;
- Removed barriers to self-expression and contribution;
- Provided students with 21st Century skills which could aide their employability and increase levels of satisfaction.

The partnership is committed to widening participation and establishing mechanisms of support for all students. The retention and success of learners during the course of their studies is important to us and this is realised through our partnership. Through social functions, recreational events and professional development seminars, the work led by students will continue to play a strategic role in how the SofE will progress as an institution. GUSTN is seeking recognition from the Student Representative Council and senior leaders beyond the SofE have expressed an interest in establishing similar staff and student partnerships elsewhere within The University.

Longitudinally, our partnership will become stronger and we will continue to enhance the student experience, so that they may benefit from the connections and rapport that we have built. Based on honesty, the approachable and dedicated staff and the enthusiasm of our students represent a model of good practice for the HE sector. Our powerful partnership realises career long professional learning.

References

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³ Glasgow University Student Teacher Network at www.twitter.com/BEdGlasgow (last accessed 25/04/13).

⁴ Education Scotland at www.educationscotland.gov.uk (last accessed 25/04/13).

⁵ The Scottish Government at www.scotland.gov.uk (last accessed 25/04/13).

⁶ Facebook at www.facebook.com (last accessed 25/04/13).

⁷ Twitter at www.twitter.com (last accessed 25/04/13).

⁸ Pedagoo at www.pedagoo.org (last accessed 25/04/13).

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